

Skynyrd's legacy of survival goes on

BY JASON HARDY
Senior staff writer

Twenty-one years ago a rented plane went down in a Mississippi swamp, killing three members of an up-and-coming band known as Lynyrd Skynyrd.

But the group survived; tonight the now-legendary rock 'n' roll band will bring a little southern comfort to Lincoln and kick off the Nebraska State Fair.

Tonight's appearance is the only stop in Nebraska for Skynyrd's '98 schedule, a tour that at one time seemed impossible.

When the plane went down in 1977, one of the four lives lost was that of Ronnie Van Zant, the group's founder and lead singer. Eleven years ago, Ronnie's younger brother, Johnny Van Zant, joined the group for a reunion performance. Six albums and a score of tours later, the band is going stronger than ever.

In a phone interview, Johnny Van Zant said that despite having been with the band for more than a decade, each performance is still emotionally charged.

"It's still a way of healing for everybody, the families and the band," he said.

When first asked to join the group, Van Zant, already an accomplished musician, said he was excited about the opportunity to perform the songs he'd listened to and loved for years, but he wasn't sure what his brother would have wanted. Ultimately, he decided Ronnie would have wanted the band to continue.

"I never felt like it was a duty of mine or that I was obligated," Van Zant said. "I've never tried to take my brother's place. I always felt like he is the quarterback, and I'm the receiver and we just try to get a touchdown."

Skynyrd's popularity has recently enjoyed a resurgence, and new material by the band has met grateful listeners. Part of the reason for the group's continued success has been attributed to Van Zant's work-

as the band's frontman.

The tone of his voice, along with his stage presence and appearance, bears an uncanny resemblance to that of his late brother - something Van Zant said was not intentional.

"If I sing a song that Ronnie wrote, we're going to have the same kind of texture and voice," Van Zant said. "We both have the same mom and dad. I never actually set out to copy anything."

Last year, cable music channel VH1 ran a story about Lynyrd Skynyrd for its "Behind the Music" series. Van Zant said that since the show aired, the band has noticed a renewed interest from older Skynyrd fans and a surge in the number of younger attendees at the group's concerts.

"I know that has helped us out," Van Zant said. "We've seen so many young kids at our shows, it's just been unreal."

Because of the success of the VH1 show, the band now is considering working on a full-length motion picture and already has received numerous offers from film companies.

However, Van Zant doesn't attribute all of the band's recent success to VH1.

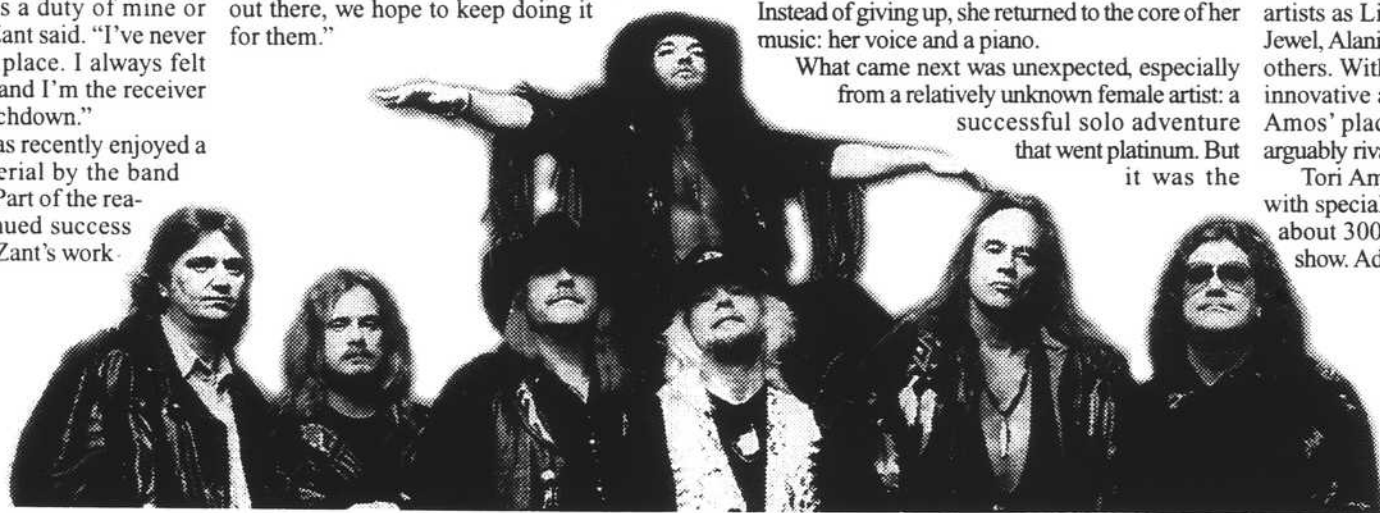
"I just think that certain bands have a magic about them," Van Zant said. "Lynyrd Skynyrd is a success story and a survival story, and I think people always want the underdog to win. I also think people are longing for real music, and that's what Lynyrd Skynyrd is."

After 25 years, the members of Lynyrd Skynyrd have suffered intense tragedy and enjoyed incredible success. For the future, Van Zant said the band will stick with the glue that has kept them together - making music.

"Lynyrd Skynyrd in our family is like eating: It's always been there," Van Zant said. "And as long as there is a Lynyrd Skynyrd fan out there, we hope to keep doing it for them."

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JOHNNY VAN ZANT
guitarist



ROCK 'N' ROLL VETERANS Lynyrd Skynyrd leads off the Nebraska State Fair concert series tonight in the Bob Devaney Sports Center. The band has struggled to stay whole since its tragic 1977 plane crash that killed four.

A little earthquake

Piano prodigy to bring slightly new sound to Omaha

BY JIM ZAVODNY
Staff writer

Tori Amos has made a life for herself out of little more than pain, love, loss - and a streak of brilliance. And for the second time in three years, that life will spend a night in Omaha.

Sunday night Amos will enchant what should be a sold-out audience of 2,800 at the Orpheum Theater, 409 S. 16th St. The vaulted theater provides an ideal setting for Amos' intimate performances and served as the Omaha venue during her "Boys For Pele" tour in 1996.

Now internationally known as a piano virtuoso, Amos first laid her blessed hands on piano keys before she was out of diapers.

By age 4, Amos tapped out Mozart concertos on the family piano. As a teenager, the prodigy launched her career officially - as a singer at local gay clubs. After she recorded her first solo album in 1991, Amos was suddenly recognized as a social and artistic phenomenon.

Her current "Plugged" tour of the United States marks her first series of appearances with a full band, adding depth to the trademark grand piano. Her critically acclaimed new album "From the Choirgirl Hotel" is also her first with a regular bass-drums-guitar influence.

While Amos' potential as a musician blossomed at a young age, her individuality and her passionate lyrics were what ultimately achieved her success in the music industry. Her confessions about personal tragedies - a victim of acquaintance rape and the miscarriage of her first pregnancy in 1996 to list a few - continue to attract new listeners who are inspired by her empathetic and emotionally charged lyrics.

The responses and stories that she continues to receive from her dedicated fans inspired her to found the non-profit charity, Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network, to help other victims.

But before the success of 1991's "Little Earthquakes," Amos hit rock bottom. A week after her 21st birthday, she left her home state of North Carolina for Los Angeles to pursue her dream of becoming a musician. Her initial breakthrough came with an '80s hair-metal band called Y Kant Tori Read.

The group's first and only album was a flop. Instead of giving up, she returned to the core of her music: her voice and a piano.

What came next was unexpected, especially from a relatively unknown female artist: a successful solo adventure that went platinum. But it was the



COURTESY PHOTO
Singer/songwriter Tori Amos makes another appearance at Omaha's Orpheum Theater. Amos' tour features, for the first time, a full live band in support of her new album, "From the Choirgirl Hotel."

subject matter of her songs that received the most attention upon the debut of "Little Earthquakes."

On the album's first single, "Crucify," Amos criticized the Catholic church, and then gave a horrific account of her rape on "Me and a Gun." Amos proved she wasn't afraid of typically taboo topics, or politically sensitive ones such as Christianity - despite growing up the daughter of a Methodist minister.

Amos continued to produce powerful piano ballads for her next two albums, 1994's "Under the Pink," which dealt with women's issues, and again two years later with "Boys For Pele," on which she tackled the men in her life.

Her accomplishments helped draw attention to the female solo artist genre, and influenced such artists as Lilith Fair founder Sarah McLachlan, Jewel, Alanis Morissette and Fiona Apple, among others. With the recent release of her sonically innovative album, "From the Choirgirl Hotel," Amos' place in the history of women in rock arguably rivals that of queen pop diva Madonna.

Tori Amos makes her Nebraska appearance with special guest The Devlins. As of Thursday, about 300 tickets remained for the 7:30 p.m. show. Admission is \$25.50 for all seats.



Tori Amos
"From the Choirgirl Hotel"
Atlantic
Grade: B+

In the fall of 1996, following the completion of a 180-date tour in support of her third solo effort, "Boys For Pele," Tori Amos learned she was

pregnant.

Exhausted after the grueling tour schedule, she planned on taking some time off to play a role she had yet to sing about in her music or experience in real life: mother.

But two days before Christmas in 1996, Amos miscarried what would have been her first child, a daughter.

The music world probably wouldn't have heard from Amos for a few years if this hadn't happened, and her next album would have dealt with subjects concerning motherhood instead of the loss she felt.

Not surprisingly, the overlying theme of "From the Choirgirl Hotel"

is how Amos struggled to find a new appreciation for life through her loss. But the album is more than just songs about her miscarriage; it's about what happens when you're at the depths of depression.

All 12 tracks were written and produced by Amos, but for the first time, she decided to collaborate in the studio with a band because she wanted to shift the emphasis of the album away from herself and her piano.

Amos explores her pain on the album's first single, "Spark," and also on the song "Playboy Mommy," where she croons about her feelings of rejection concerning the miscarriage ("Then the baby came/before I

found/the magic how/to keep her happy").

However, "From the Choirgirl Hotel" isn't all dark and dreary. Amos dabbles in electronica on "Hotel" and "Raspberry Swirl," which appears fourth and is the first dose of something dance-worthy on the album. Amos purists may not agree with the vocal effects and her piano mixed with drum loops on those songs, but it's nice to hear her create something different, and actually, it's kind of funky.

The band is a welcome addition to the mix, yet the album is at its best when Amos gets back to the basics. "Jackie's Strength," which talks about

her recent marriage, provides the best example of this, with its Enya-like harmonies and strings coupled with the strength of her piano-playing. Other piano ballads include the gorgeous tale of lost love, "Northern Lad" and the haunting "Black-Dove (January)."

"From the Choirgirl Hotel" weaves the latest chapter of the singer/songwriter/piano-goddess' intricate life. It's definitely a far cry from her previous material, but fans should have no problem taking in her latest adventures in song, which also should help her attract a broader audience.

- Jim Zavodny